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SUBJECT Selection of a New CIA Director

✓ CHARLES GIBSON: As you've seen in the news and seen in the headlines, yesterday Robert Gates, the number two man at CIA under William Casey and the President's choice to head the Agency, withdrew his nomination. And that leads, of course, to some questions about the agency. How much has the CIA been damaged by all the negative publicity of recent months?

Well, we have two former CIA Directors with us this morning. Admiral Stansfield Turner joins us from our Washington Bureau. And William Colby is with us from our ABC affiliate in Austin, Texas, KVUE-TV. A

Good morning to both of you. And you're nice to join us this morning.

Mr. Casey, let me start with you -- I'm sorry. Mr. Colby, let me start with you.

How bad a blow is this, do you think, to the Agency itself?

WILLIAM COLBY: Well, I think you're getting a repetition of the sensationalism and attacks on the Agency. But when the investigations are finished, I think you'll find that the Agency essentially stuck to its business, that on Iran it did what the President said, and that it essentially stayed out of the Contra thing. You'll find a fingerprint or so along the edge of what it should do, and maybe over. But that's about all.

GIBSON: Admiral Turner, though there may just be a fingerprint or two from the Agency on this case, nonetheless this looks bad, does it not, having the withdraw the nomination of Mr.

Gates?

ADMIRAL STANSFIELD TURNER: Oh, yes, it does. I think Gates is a fine professional. But the Congress is uncertain at this time just what shape the CIA is in. If it needs a major overhaul, Gates, of course, is not the man to do it. He was too closely associated with Casey. If it just needs some touching up, he could have done the job. But they're just not sure in the Congress, and they won't know until all the investigations are completed.

I think there are at least two examples of very likely illegalities that the CIA did, and at least two examples of people in the CIA who were out of control. How bad those are, we're going to have to wait and see.

GIBSON: So you think it was more than Mr. Colby said, a fingerprint or two.

ADMIRAL TURNER: I'm afraid it's a little more than that, in my opinion. Because when you break the law, like carrying out a covert action without a presidential finding, or like having a chief of station of the CIA in Costa Rica who had to be withdrawn and removed from the Agency because of what he was doing in support of the Contras, I'm concerned. People have to be under firm control.

GIBSON: All right, let me come back to that, Mr. Colby. Mistakes should be...

COLBY: I certainly agree with the need for full control. There's no doubt about that. And as I say, I think you'll find a few fingerprints on the wrong side of the line here. But I don't think that passing a message from Ollie North to a Contra leader is any huge involvement of the CIA in Costa Rica. I think that's the point. We'll find some things that should not have happened.

It's more or less like Watergate. In Watergate, John Ehrlichman tried to blame the CIA for the whole operation. And what actually developed was that, yes, the CIA had done a couple of foolish things that it should not have done, but essentially it stayed away from the White House capers and activities. And I think it's very similar in this situation.

GIBSON: Mr. Gates said he withdrew because there was going to be a long delay, that the Senate was not going to act on his nomination until after their investigation by the Select Committee on the Iran-Contra Affair was over.

Would the CIA have suffered from that kind of a delay, or was it just the President who was going to suffer?

Admiral Turner?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think both would have suffered. I think the CIA doesn't need to be dragged through more controversy than is absolutely essential under these circumstances. But I believe the primary consideration was the presidency, the desire to let Mr. Baker get things back on an even keel.

GIBSON: Do you agree with that, Mr. Colby? Do you think Mr. Gates thus becomes a scapegoat?

COLBY: Well, I think Chairman Boren of the Senate Committee expressed it best when he really gave high praise to Gates for withdrawing, because of the fact that the Agency and its leadership for the next several months would be ambiguous. And you can't leave an important agency like the CIA with ambiguous leadership. It's got too many critical problems for our country over the next days. And if the Senate wasn't going to work its will until it got the full answer, then that meant a long period of confusion. And I think Mr. Gates deserves great praise for withdrawing in that situation.

GIBSON: Let me put you both in a realm that you don't otherwise sit in. Let me have you choose who the person now is to head the CIA. Do they need a white knight to lead it, and who should that be?

Mr. Colby?

COLBY: Well, I think they need a very good man with impeccable credentials. I heard the name Brent Scowcroft earlier on the program, and he would, of course, be a superb nominee. There's no question about it.

There are military people, ex-military people. There are some political people that would be quite good, with impeccable backgrounds. I think they'll find somebody pretty good.

GIBSON: Admiral Turner?

ADMIRAL TURNER: I think you need somebody, first of all, who's going to be able to work well with the Congress; secondly, who's going to put covert actions into a better perspective; and thirdly, who's going to be a good manager and will keep the Agency under full control.

I'd name Brent Scowcroft and Bill Webster as my choices.

GIBSON: From the FBI.

ADMIRAL TURNER: Yes.

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GIBSON: Admiral Turner, Mr. Colby, thank you ever so much for being with us this morning. Very interesting. And we hope to see you again soon.